Types and Function of Taboo Words Found in American Gangster Movie

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Abstract

The phenomenon that usually happens in our life which nowadays many people used taboo words in their daily communication and it is one of the most efficient ways to expressing feeling in any situation. This study aims at (1) finding out the types of taboo utterances found in *American Gangster* movie, and (2) analysing the function of taboo utterances found in *American Gangster* movie. The data of this study were taken from a movie entitled *American Gangster*. The genre of this movie is crime drama. This study used descriptive qualitative method, by describing the word or phrase of taboo words from the movie. The qualitative method is applied in order to give clear analysis on the data according to the theory proposed by Battistella (2005) and Wardhaugh (2006). The result of this study shows that all types and functions of taboo words were found. First, there are four types of taboo words are epithets, profanity, vulgarity, obscenity. Vulgarity is the most dominant type used by the characters in the movie. Second, there are four functions of taboo words, such as; to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be provocative, to mock authority. The most function of taboo words found in the movie is to show contempt. It is employed by characters in the movie. To support the analysis some dictionaries of taboo words are used.

Keywords: *taboo words, types, function, movie*

Abstrak

Fenomene yang biasa terjadi dalam kehidupan kita dimana saat ini banyak orang menggunakan kata-kata tabu dalam komunikasi sehari-hari dan merupakan salah satu cara yang paling efisien untuk mengungkapkan perasaan dalam situasi apapun. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk (1) mengetahui jenis-jenis tuturan tabu yang terdapat dalam film American Gangster, dan (2) menganalisis fungsi tuturan tabbu dalam film American Gangster. Data penelitian ini diambil dari sebuah film berjudul American Gangster. Genre film ini adalah drama criminal. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, dengan mendeskripsikan kata atau frasa tabu dari film tersebut. Metode kualitatif diterapkan untuk memberikan analisis data yang jelas sesuai teori yang dikemukan oleh Battistella (2005) dan Wardhaugh (2006). Hasil penelitian ini menunjukan bahwa semua jenis dan fungsi kata tabu ditemukan. Pertama, ada empat jenis kata tabu yaitu juukan, kata-kata kotor, vulgar, cabul. Vulgar adalah jenis yang paling dominan digunakan oleh karakter dalam film. Kedua, ada empat fungsi kata tabu yaitu untuk menarik perhatian seseorang, untuk menunjukan penghinaan, untuk menjadi provokatif, untuk mengejek otoritas. Fungsi kata tabu yang paling banyak ditemukan dalam film adalah untuk menunjukan penghinaan. Ini digunakan oleh karakter dalam film. Untuk mendukung analisis beberapa kamus kata-kata tabu yang digunakan.

Kata kunci: *kata tabu, jenis, fungsi,film*

Introduction

Language has an important role in human life because it is the main means of communication. Lyons in Jandal (1968) says that language are principal system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participant in its culture, communicate. Chaika (1982: 2) also states that people use language to reveal or conceal personal identity, character and background without realizing that they are actually doing so. As a means of communication, language has several functions. For instance, people sometimes use certain kind of words that are considered as bad language which is actually inappropriate to use. One of the ways to express their feeling is by producing taboo words.

According to Trudgill (2000), taboo is associated with things which are not said, and in particular with words and expressions which are not used. Yule (2010), stated taboo terms are words and phrase that people avoid for reason related to religion, politeness, and prohibited behaviour. It describes people use taboo words in certain situations, but not in formal situations. Taboo sometimes can be found in dialogue of a movie. The actor or actress expresses taboo words to attract the viewers, but not all viewers understand the utterances of taboo words. It is caused by many factors, especially by culture factor.

The problem is the phenomenon that usually happen in our life, which is now days many people use taboo word to communicate. The writer interested to analysing taboo expression since in *American Gangster* movie there are taboo utterances spoken by the actor that are not understood by the viewers especially the movie watch by Indonesian viewers. Specifically, the research focused on (1) types of taboo utterances found in American Gangster movie and (2) the functions of taboo utterances found in American Gangster movie. The types of taboo words were analysed by using the theory Battisttela (2005:72) and Wardhaugh (2006:239) for the function of taboo words.

In order to develop scientific study, some previous studies have been reviewed. The first study by Sanjaya, 2018, the previous study aimed to determine the forms, functions, and motive of English taboo words which are contained in movie Get Hard. The second study by Himawan, 2020, the purpose of previous study is to explain the types and functions of taboo words in movie used qualitative descriptive study. The third is an article by Rahmayani and Fitrawati, 2018. The researcher chose the utterance that containing the taboo language and grouped them into types and function of taboo words.this article described data and characteristic about the population or phenomenon being studied. The last is an article by Nurazizah, 2019. The previous study focuses on the use of taboo words by the characters from different social classes

in two movies produced in different time. The previous study taken the dialogues and monologues of the characters and for the purpose of collecting secondary data, it takes some implicit backgrounds, such the character's situation when communicating, social classes and educational background.

Method

The data of this study were taken from a movie entitled American Gangster and the genre is crime drama which was directed by Ridley Scott. The movie American Gangster premiered at the Apollo Theater on October 19, 2007 and was released in the United States on November 2, 2007 with duration 157 minutes. Based on Rotten Tomatoes, the movie has an 80% positive reviews, with an average rating of 7/10. According to Metacritic, the movie received a score of 76 out of 100, based on 38 critics, indicating good reviews.

The method used to collected the data in this study by using observation and documentation method. Some technique of collecting the data in this study such as, (1) Watching the movie with subtitle, (2) Observing and recording the conversation, (3) Taking notes all utterances among characters which contain taboo words.

The data were collected by using qualitative and quantitative method. The first problem used theory by Battistella (2005: 72) to find out the types of taboo utterances in *American Gangster* movie. The second problem used theory by Wardhaugh (2006: 239) to describe the functions of taboo utterances in *American Gangster* movie.

Result and Discussion

Based on the problem of the study as mentioned in the introduction, the data of the American Gangster movie was analysed. There are 59 data were found in this movie, but only 5 data used as the representative data in this research. The writer provided the data found in movie in two parts: (1) to show the finding types of taboo words and (2) to show the functions of taboo words.

Table 1. Data the Types of Taboo Word Found in American Gangster Movie

Types of Taboo Words	The Data of Taboo Words	Occurrence	Percentage
Epithets	- White male	3	
	- Chow mein	1	23,7%
	- Chinese	3	
	- Nigga	4	
	- Faggot	2	
	- Puto	1	
Profanity	- Jesus	7	
	- Goddam	1	23,7%
	- Hell	3	
	- Holyshit	1	
	- Bloody	1	
	- Fucking hell	1	
Vulgarity	- Cock	1	
	- Ass	5	
	- Dick	4	
	- Tits	1	32'2%
	- Cunt	3	
	- Asshole	3	
	- Buttock	1	
	- Nut	1	
Obscenity	- Shit	2	
	- Fuck	3	
	- Fucking	6	
	- Bullshit	1	
Total	24	59	100%

Table 2. Tabulation of Functions of Taboo Words

The Functions of Taboo Words	The Expression of the speaker	Occurrence	Percentage
To draw attention to oneself	White male, chow mein, nigga, Jesus, hell, bloody, nuts, ass, buttock, fuckin', bullshit.	18	30.5 %
To show contempt	Chinese, jesus, hell, holyshit, fucking, ass, cock, dick, cunt, fuck, nut, shit.	30	50.8 %

To be provocative	Chinese, white boy, fuck, fucker, jesus, ass, asshole, shit.	8	13.5 %
To mock authority	Fuckin, shit, nigger.	3	5.2 %
	Total	59	100 %

Types and Function of Taboo Words

Data 1

> Frank : who you think it is, boy? Frank.
> Teddy : Frank who?
> Frank : Frank your brother, **negro**.
>
> (*American Gangster*, 00:47:08)

In the dialogues, Frank uttered the word negro that is based on Battistella theory (2005) the word negro is related to epithets. Based on Oxford dictionary the word nigga is belonging to any of the various populations characterized by dark skin pigmentation, specifically Africa, Oceania, and Australia. In this data, the word **nigga** is found as epithets because it can be used against people who admit racist beliefs, as those in people's group do and those who accept such beliefs without being conscious of them.

The dialogues happened when Frank calling his brother to ask about his mother, but Teddy didn't notice Frank's voice. Frank uttering the word nigga to express his brotherhood toward Teddy and they're black. This taboo word have function to draw attention to oneself which are believe have power in gaining listener's attention because of its strong connotation.

Data 2

> All people : **Goddam it**, open this fucking door!
> Richie : Give me your gun, man.
> All people : Get your punk ass out here, man!
>
> (*American Gangster,* 00:34:57)

In the dialogues there was a taboo word goddam that is based on Battistella theory is related to profanity, because the word goddam related to the name of God, unspeakably vile. According to Oxford dictionary, the word goddam is an expression of anger and sometimes can also mean something worthless. In the informal situation,

the word goddam used to emphasize emotions such as upset, surprised anger or distress.

   The dialogues happened when Richie told them to give the gun to him, but the people didn't want to do that and they was annoyed. The word goddam was said by the people to expressed their disappointment toward Richie. According to Wardhaugh (2006) this taboo word have function to show contempt that means something is totally useless and cannot be regarded. In other words, when someone tries to show contempt by using taboo words, he or she will insult the addressee by uttering words that can offend their pride.

Data 3

   Police   : He loves big **ass**, man. He's a bulldog. He don't fuck around, all right. He's got a bit of temper, yeah, but you can trust this guy with your grandmother.

                     (*American Gangster,* 00:50:59)

   In the dialogue above according to Battistella (2005) the word ass is related to vulgarity, because this term refers to a part of human's body which is included in sexual anatomy. In this case the word ass was classified into taboo words. In the formal situation, the word ass is replace with a person's butt. In the informal situation to show a bad or annoying person. Based on Oxford dictionary ass mean the part of the body that you sit on your bottom.

   The dialogue took a place at bar when the police negotiate with Richie to take new partner. The police describe his friend to Richie with saying a taboo word ass to provoke a certain response from Richie, because they often celebrated the heroin and sex party with their friends and community. When someone utters taboo words, he or she may have an intention to provoke a certain response such as violation or anger from others. Taboo words are considered successful when the response is suitable with the speaker's expectation.

Data 4

Rossi   : They basically control the market with it. What the **fuck** happened to the world, Frank?

Frank   : Fuckin crocks.

Rossi   : Sad about Bumpy.

(*American Gangster,* 00:15:38)

In the dialogues, Rossi uttered fuck that is based on Batistela (2005) the word fuck is related to obscenity, because that word related to the sexual activity that involves one person or more in expressing their sexuality. In this case, the word fuck was classified into taboo words. Based on the Oxford dictionary, the word fuck is used to expressed anger, horror, or surprise and it is not allowed to be spoken in the formal situation because it is considered as offensive. In the informal situation it uses to express annoyance or impatience.

The word fuck is said by Rossi to express his anger and disappointment toward Frank, because Frank does not continue his investigation after he knew that Bumpy was died. In other words, people used taboo words because they want to express their disappointment about reality that are different from what they have expected. Therefore, some people may prefer to use certain taboo words that are directed to mock authority in order to show their disbelief about governmental stuffs.

Data 5

Richie   : And then you don't want to fucking touch her?

Jimmy   : I can unlock the door!

Richie   : are you **nuts**? Get out of the fucking car!

Jimmy   : are you kidding me?

(*American Gangster,* 01:23:59)

In the dialogues, Richie uttered the word nuts is based on Batttistela (2005) the word nuts related to vulgarity. Based on Cambridge dictionary, the word nuts used to express disgust, scorn, and disappointment. Richie uttered the word nuts because he disappointment with what Jimmy' do. In this data, the word nuts found as vulgarity because nuts related with part of human's body.

The dialogues happened in the situation that Richie caught Jimmy who tried to give a drug to the prostitute. Richie caught him and told him to get out of the car, but Jimmy didn't want to do it and Richie use the taboo words and forced him to get out

of the cars as a taboo expression. The taboo expression is uttered to draw attention to oneself that means to stimulate an instant reaction from Jimmy who ignore Richie. Therefore, people use taboo words which are believed to have a power in gaining listener's attention because of its strong connotation.

Data 6

Frank	: paying cops is one thing, I understand that. I been paying them since I was ten, put more of their kids through college then the national merit award. This is different, this special Investigations Unit. They think they are special.
Charlie	: They're **fucking** crooks. No code of ethics.
Frank	: Someone's been following me. Besides cops. I see cars where they shouldn't be. Guys I don't know-
Charlie	: Me, too.

<div align="right">

(*American Gangster,* 01:59:00)

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In the dialogues, Charlie uttered the word Fucking that is based on Battistella (2005) is related to obscenity, because the word fuckin is related to sexual activity and excretory function which can generate disgust. Based on Oxford dictionary, the word fucking means a word that many people find offensive that uses to emphasize a comment or angry statement.

The dialogues happened at Frank's home when he decorates the Christmas tree. Frank was realized that he has done the practice of bribe since he was child. He spoke that bribing the police was something usual for him, even more it could help the police to pay the study of their children in the school. Charlie uttered the word "they're **fucking** croks", to express his disappointment toward the police, because he thinks that the police doesn't have code of ethics. In other words, when someone tries to show contempt by using taboo words, he or she will insult the addressee by uttering words that can offend their pride.

Conclusion

Taboo words are actually connected with something that is avoided and forbidden to talk about. In this study which used the data source from American Gangster move, it was found that there are four types of taboo words found in American Gangster movie, namely epithets such as white male, chow mein, chinese, nigga, fagot, puto. Profanity such as Jesus, goddam, hell, holyshit, bloody, fucking

hell. Vulgarity such as cock, ass, dick, tits, cunt, asshole, buttock, nut. Obscenity such as shit, fuck, fucking, and bullshit. The total of taboo words that uttered by the characters in American Gangster movie are fifty nine. The dominant type of taboo words used in the movie is vulgarity. Based on the analysis, the use of taboo words is found in daily speech among the people. The use of taboo words is based on the culture, psychology and social condition of the user. The different situation of sociology and psychology of the speaker may also produce the different category of taboo words.

Moreover, the function of taboo words in American Gangster movie based on word used and background of the characters and setting of the scene. From the analysis in previous chapter the writer can conclude the function of taboo words classified into four groups including to draw attention to oneself, to show contempt, to be provocative, and to mock authority. Most function of taboo words which are found to show contempt.

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